



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice China

China – CHN37032 – Roman Catholics –
Fujian – Vatican
27 July 2010

1. Please provide information on treatment of Roman Catholics in Fuqing, Fujian Province.

There is insufficient information available to provide a comprehensive assessment of the treatment of Catholics in Fuqing, however, it is unlikely to differ from the overall situation for Catholics in Fujian province as a whole. Reports provide ambiguous information on the treatment of Roman Catholics in Fujian. Some reports indicate the relative liberal ability of people to practice Catholicism in Fujian compared with the rest of China when conducted in a discreet manner, whilst others say it is risky to be an underground Catholic. Information further suggests that members of the underground clergy may be more likely to be under official scrutiny than 'lay' followers. Overall, the ability of underground Catholics in Fujian to practice their faith ultimately depends on the attitude of local officials.

The practice of Catholicism in China is allowed within state-sanctioned parameters set out by the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA). This was brought about in a bid to assert authority over China's Catholics, when Beijing cut ties with the Vatican in 1951 and began the practice of ordaining its own bishops.¹ The Chinese Government repressed the religious activities of "underground" Roman Catholic clergy in large part due to their avowed loyalty to the Vatican (the Pope), which the Government accused of interfering in the country's internal affairs.² So whilst historically there has been a division of the Catholic Church in China, there are recent media articles that indicate collaboration between the Vatican and the Chinese Patriotic Association which will be discussed further in question two.

Roman Catholics who are loyal to the Vatican may still be subject to adverse treatment by officials when they practice their religion outside of the state-sanctioned parameters. Application of the law by Fujian officials is inconsistent as will be demonstrated by the ambiguous information to follow. Whilst no recent reports were found involving the adverse treatment of underground Catholic followers, there is a recent report of an underground priest from Fujian being arrested as provided below.

On 24 March 2010, the Catholic news website *Asia News* reported the arrest on 19 March of Father Liu Maochun, an underground Catholic priest from the diocese of Mindong in Fujian, for being involved in the organisation of a camp for university students. Another priest involved in the camp, Fr. John Baptist Luo Wen, is reported to have been previously arrested and released after fifteen days imprisonment. *Asia News* also reported that two other priests involved in the camp "received a notice of detention and expect to be taken into custody in the near future".³

It is difficult to determine the treatment of a Roman Catholic in Fujian as the attitude and religious tolerance of the local Chinese officials is subjective and can be changed at any time. The Cardinal

¹ Lim, L. 2010, 'China's Divided Catholics seek Reconciliation', National Public Radio, 20 July Attachment 1.

² US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, Macau)*, 26 October, Introduction, Section II – Attachment 2.

³ 'Another underground priest arrested in Fujian' 2010, *Asia News*, 24 March <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Another-underground-priest-arrested-in-Fujian-17965.html#> – Accessed 20 April 2010 – Attachment 3.

Kung Foundation note that the treatment of Catholics, like the treatment of members of other religious groups, may vary depending on the tolerance shown by local authorities.⁴ Similarly, according to the US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*, officials have wide latitude in interpreting what constitutes the "normal religious activities" that are sanctioned by the State. This report notes that

[I]n some locations, local authorities reportedly forced unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce ordinations approved by the Holy See, join the official church, or face a variety of punishments including fines, job loss, detentions, and having their children barred from school.⁵

Advice received from Mr Joseph Kung, who wrote to the Tribunal in response to questions⁶ the Tribunal had put to the Cardinal Kung Foundation in November 2009, commented, "[o]ne must remember that religious persecution is very much alive in China."⁷ In similar correspondence with the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRBC), Mr Kung noted:

It is extremely difficult and risky for unofficial priests to administer their pastoral duty. It is also equally difficult and risky for underground or unofficial Catholics to fulfill their religious and Sacramental obligations. Many unofficial religious and laypersons are arrested for their religious activities, and let go only after a large sum [is] paid to government officials. These paid government fines are generally without official receipts. There is simply no freedom of practicing religion in China, and [...] the persecution of the underground or unofficial Catholic church is ongoing in China.⁸

Indeed, Dr. Anthony E. Clarke, Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama⁹ noted in March 2009 that,

[c]hanges in the communist state's attitudes toward religion have allowed many Catholics to live in the open, but they live in terror – their freedom may be removed at any moment. You see this enormous restoration work on churches and this enormous freedom given to Protestants and Catholics... Yet at the same time, you'll see an arrest of an underground bishop, or a couple gets a warning from the party police about a visit they had with a foreigner. So the old powers are still there, and you don't know when they'll re-emerge.¹⁰

An older report produced by Human Rights Watch states that "local officials continue to repress religious activities that they determine to be outside the scope of the state-controlled religious system. Their decisions are often made arbitrarily and in a manner inconsistent with the right to

⁴ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010, *CHN103501.E – China: Situation of Catholics and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2005 – 2010)*, 6 July - Attachment 4.

⁵ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, Macau)*, 26 October, Sec.2 - Attachment 2.

⁶ RRT Country Advice 2009, Email to Joseph Kung of the Cardinal Kung Foundation 'Information Request about Catholic Church in China', 30 November – Attachment 5.

⁷ Kung, Joseph 2009, Email to RRT 'Re: Information Request about Catholic Church in China (Ref: CHN35792)', 8 December – Attachment 6.

⁸ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010, *CHN103501.E – China: Situation of Catholics and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2005 – 2010)*, 6 July - Attachment 4

⁹ Clark, A.E., 2006, 'Two Chinese Churches? Or One? An Interview with Fr. Daniel Cerezo, Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus', *Ignatius Insight website*, June http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2006/aclark_chinesechurch_jun06.asp - Accessed 1 September 2009 – Attachment 7.

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¹⁰ 'US Historian's Travels Uncover New Freedoms, New Fears Among Roman Catholics in China', 2009, UA News, *University of Alabama*, 3 March <http://uanews.ua.edu/2009/03/ua-historians-travels-uncover-new-freedoms-new-fears-among-roman-catholics-in-china/> - Accessed 7 July 2010 - Attachment 8.

freedom of belief or religion.”¹¹ This report states that the key to avoiding arrest is discretion. As long as meetings of Catholic congregants remain “small, discreet and apolitical, officials often turned a blind eye. Reported detentions followed the celebration of masses that attracted large numbers, for public celebration of important Catholic feast days and during pastoral retreats.”¹²

In contrast, the Executive Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council, an ecumenical grouping of Christian churches and organisations in Hong Kong, stated in correspondence with the Research Directorate of the IRBC, dated 14 June 2010, that he believes that Chinese authorities have demonstrated a:

high degree of tolerance towards Christian activities in general and particularly towards those non-registered groups [...]. There are indications to suggest that the Government wants to have those non-registered Christian groups to gradually register with the Government. Therefore the Christians in China in general are able to have more space to express their faith and to have a much wider range of diverse expressions during the past few years.¹³

He further expressed the opinion that officials in Guangdong and Fujian provinces have good relations with government-recognised bishops and have allowed non official bishops to operate openly.¹⁴

Conversely, according to a translation of an article in *La Croix*, a daily newspaper published in Paris dated 22 January 2010, Fujian is, alongside Hebei, Zhejiang and Liaoning, one of the provinces where the most unregistered Catholics are located and that they are [translation] “tightly controlled” by local authorities.¹⁵

An older media article sourced from the *Miami Herald*, dated 14 January 2007, also claims that the Chinese Communist Party has “partially relaxed its grip on religious activity” and that in Nanping, in Fujian, “religion thrives”. The article also indicates that in Nanping “[a] state-controlled Catholic Church draws new members, as does a parallel but underground Catholic Church that’s loyal to the Vatican.”¹⁶

Overall, the ambiguous information from a variety of sources indicates that the ability of underground Catholics in Fujian to practice their faith ultimately depends on the attitude of local officials.

More dated (prior to 2006) information on the treatment of underground Catholics including the church demolitions in Fujian in 2006, 2002, 2000 and 1999 and examples of arrests of Catholic priests and parishioners in Fujian can be found in a previous Country Advice *RRT Country Advice* CHN36515.¹⁷

¹¹ Human Rights Watch 2006, ‘China: A Year after New Regulations, Religious Rights Still Restricted’, 1 March http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/01/china12740_txt.htm – Accessed 17 March 2006 – Attachment 9.

¹² Human Rights Watch 2006, ‘China: A Year after New Regulations, Religious Rights Still Restricted’, 1 March http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/01/china12740_txt.htm – Accessed 17 March 2006 – Attachment 9.

¹³ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010, CHN103501.E – *China: Situation of Catholics and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2005 – 2010)*, 6 July http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=453030&l=e – Accessed 26 July 2010 – Attachment 4

¹⁴ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010, CHN103501.E – *China: Situation of Catholics and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2005 – 2010)*, 6 July http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=453030&l=e – Accessed 26 July 2010 – Attachment 4

¹⁵ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010, CHN103501.E – *China: Situation of Catholics and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2005 – 2010)*, 6 July http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=453030&l=e – Accessed 26 July 2010 – Attachment 4. Originally sourced from *La Croix* [Paris]. 22 January 2010. “Reportage; Les premiers chrétiens de Yiwu vivent leur foi avec entrain.” (Factiva)

¹⁶ Johnson, Tim 2007, ‘In China, Christianity rises again; RELIGION’, *The Miami Herald*, 14 January – Attachment 10.

¹⁷ RRT Country Advice 2010, RRT Country Advice CHN36515, 14 April Attachment 11

2. Please provide any information which is available on the Catholic authority in Rome (the Vatican's) attitude to the situation in China and whether they are working with the authorities and official Catholic Church in China.

The Vatican's attitude towards the divided Catholic Church in China is that it seeks reconciliation as set out in the Papal Letter sent to Chinese Catholics in June 2007. Pope Benedict XVI has also decreed 24 May to be International Day of Prayer for China which was this year celebrated by official and underground Catholics at a shrine near Shanghai.

Further positive developments have recently been reported with the ordination of four bishops, all endorsed by both the Chinese Patriotic Association (CPA) and the Vatican. These ordinations demonstrate the Vatican working with the Chinese authorities in an attempt to reconcile the Catholic Church in China. However, according to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada in July 2010:

The Vatican and the Chinese government do not have official diplomatic relations and the CPA forbids official relations or communication between its members and clergy and the Vatican or other non-Chinese Catholic organisations...In some cases in recent years, both sides have collaborated in the appointment of mutually acceptable bishops.¹⁸

A media article in the *Global Times* dated May 2010 provides background information of the strained relations between the Vatican and Chinese officials. The discord commenced after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, when the Vatican refused to recognise the PRC by prohibiting Chinese Catholics from supporting the new government through maintaining diplomatic relations with Taiwan. The article states that:

China, as a sovereign state, required that bishops appointed by the Vatican should be approved by the government, as has been the case with other religions in China historically. But the Vatican holds the idea that the ordination of bishops is an issue of freedom of religion...The appointment of bishops has been a key issue between China and the Vatican...The recent improvements in relations show the Chinese government changed its attitude somewhat.¹⁹

Ordination of Bishops

Improving signs of communications between Beijing and the Holy See are emerging with recent reports that China's state-backed church has begun to ordain Vatican-approved bishops after a hiatus of more than two years. Recently, bishops have been ordained in Sanyuan (Shaanxi), Hohhot (Inner Mongolia), Haimen (Jiangsu) and Xiamen Fujian).

Asia News reported in June 2010 that Monsignor Joseph Han Yingjin was ordained as the new bishop of Sanyuan (Shaanxi). His ordination was approved by the Holy See and took place in the church of the Sacred Heart in Yuanmenxiang. Bishop Han was the fourth Vatican approved bishop to be ordained in China since last April, after those of Hohhot, Haimen and Xiamen. According to this report, "unlike what happened in the past, this time all the bishop concelebrants were in communion with the Holy See."²⁰

In May 2010, the *Financial Times* also reported that China's state-backed church had begun to ordain Vatican-approved bishops after a hiatus of more than two years, signalling that long-strained relations between the two sides were on the mend. The article states that:

¹⁸ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010, *CHN103501.E – China: Situation of Catholics and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2005 – 2010)*, 6 July http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=453030&l=e – Accessed 26 July 2010 - Attachment 4.

¹⁹ Li Yanjie. 2010, 'Bishop consensus hints at Sino-Vatican entente', *Global Times*, 13 May http://opinion.globaltimes.cn/commentary/2010-05/531147_2.html - Accessed 22 July 2010 - Attachment 12.

²⁰ Yuan, Zhen. 2010, 'New bishop of Sanyuan, approved by the Vatican', *Asia News* website <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/New-bishop-of-Sanyuan,-approved-by-the-Vatican-18771.html#> - Accessed 22 July 2010 - Attachment 13.

Cai Bingrui was ordained bishop of Xiamen, in south-eastern Fujian province, at the weekend. He was the third bishop to be installed in as many weeks with the approval of both China's government-sanctioned Catholic Patriotic Association and the Vatican.

The Vatican is the only country in the developed world that still maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan rather than China.

Despite recent improvements, Sino-Vatican relations remain delicate and could be easily derailed by another unilateral bishop appointment.

In addition, Church officials worry that a bishop not recognised by the Vatican, such as Mr Ma, might preside over a forthcoming ordination.

Bishops approved by Rome are also under pressure to attend and lend legitimacy to Chinese domestic bodies, including the National Congress of Catholic Representatives, whose authority is not recognised by the Pope.²¹

An editorial comment from *Global Times* in May 2010 reported that despite China having an estimated 12 million Catholic believers, its relations with the Vatican have been poor for many years. The recent Catholic ordinations in China, however, have been approved by both the Vatican and the Chinese authorities, indicating an improvement in the relationship.²²

In addition to the collaborative ordaining of bishops by the Vatican and the official Catholic Church in China, the attitude of the Vatican to the situation in China can be demonstrated through Pope Benedict XVI designating May 24 as the international day of prayer for China.²³ According to *Asia News*, "the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China was celebrated at the shrine to Our Lady of Sheshan which is a national shrine on the outskirts of Shanghai and has always been a place where underground and official Christians have come together in devotion to Mary."²⁴

Papal Letter

Sources report that Pope Benedict XVI has made efforts to encourage unity between regulated and unregulated churches notably through a 2007 open letter to Chinese Catholics.²⁵ This 28-page Papal Letter was made publicly available on 30 June 2007 and expressed the Pope's hopes for reconciliation between the open and underground factions of the Chinese Church.

The Vatican attempted to be diplomatic in the release of the Papal Letter and according to a National Public Radio article, it should be considered significant that the Vatican sent the Papal Letter to the Chinese government prior to its release to Chinese Catholics.

According to the article:

It's significant, too, that despite the lack of any official ties, Pope Benedict's letter was sent to the Chinese government before being issued to the faithful. There was a very careful consideration on the part of the Vatican, the Holy See, to make the letter available to the authorities in China, letting them know it would be disseminated among the faithful. That really was a gesture among the Holy See and Vatican

²¹ Mitchell, T. 2010, 'China ordains bishops backed by Vatican', *Financial Times*, 9 May <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/5e4e4eba-5b7c-11df-85a3-00144feab49a.html> - Accessed 14 July 2010 - Attachment 14.

²² Li Yanjie. 2010, 'Bishop consensus hints at Sino-Vatican entente', *Global Times*, 13 May http://opinion.globaltimes.cn/commentary/2010-05/531147_2.html - Accessed 22 July 2010 - Attachment 12

²³ Lim, L. 2010, 'China's Divided Catholics seek Reconciliation', National Public Radio, 20 July - Attachment 1.

²⁴ Cervellera, B. 2010, "Our lady of Sheshan, persecution and division", *Asia News* website <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Our-Lady-of-Sheshan,-persecution-and-division-18496.html> - Accessed 22 July 2010 - Attachment 15.

²⁵ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010, *CHN103501.E – China: Situation of Catholics and treatment by authorities, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong (2005 – 2010)*, 6 July http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=453030&l=e – Accessed 26 July 2010 - Attachment 4.

officials to relate to the Chinese government and to let them know that they weren't trying to do any rousing up of the faithful against their own country.²⁶

While many Chinese Catholics welcomed Benedict's call for reconciliation and forgiveness, its publication was not without controversy. Beijing's response to the Papal Letter was that several hours after the letter's release, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) released a terse communiqué reiterating China's preconditions to restoration of diplomatic relations: severance of the Holy See's diplomatic ties with Taiwan, recognition of the PRC "as the sole legitimate government representing the whole of China" and an explicit promise that it will "never interfere in China's internal affairs, including in the name of religion."²⁷ Many mainland Catholic websites published the letter, but the government ordered them to remove it and shut down some of the sites. Nonetheless, many dioceses distributed copies, some of whom studied it in groups.²⁸

In 2009, US government reports detailed the arrest of an unofficial bishop from Hebei, Bishop Jia Zhiguo on the 30 March 2009 because he was trying to distribute an open letter from the Pope to Catholics in China. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) *Annual Report 2009- Countries of Particular Concern* states that:

The Chinese government took active steps to halt distribution of Pope Benedict's 2007 open letter to Chinese Catholics, including twice detaining Bishop Jia Zhiguo of Hebei province, and beating him while in custody, to prevent him from distributing the letter.

In that letter, the Pope recognized that, although there have been some improvements, grave limitations on religious freedom in China remain, which the Church cannot accept. Nevertheless, the Pope called on Chinese Catholics to adopt the approach of "respectful and constructive dialogue".²⁹

The US Congressional Executive Commission on China *Annual Report 2009* also states that "Pope Benedict XVI reiterated his call for reconciliation between unregistered and registered Chinese Catholic bishops, and the Chinese Government continued a decade-long pattern of acting to undermine reconciliation that does not occur on CPA-dictated terms."³⁰

²⁶ Lim, L. 2010, 'China's Divided Catholics seek Reconciliation', National Public Radio, 20 July - Attachment 1.

²⁷ Marion T Horvath, 2007, "Benedict delivers Chinese underground Catholics to Communism," *Tradition in Action*, July http://www.traditioninaction.org/religious/m014 rpBetrayal_of_China.html - accessed on 15 August 2008. (CISNET) - Attachment 16.

²⁸ Marion T Horvath, 2007, "Benedict delivers Chinese underground Catholics to Communism," *Tradition in Action*, July http://www.traditioninaction.org/religious/m014 rpBetrayal_of_China.html - accessed on 15 August 2008. (CISNET) - Attachment 16.

²⁹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2009, *USCIRF Annual Report 2009 – Countries of Particular Concern: People's Republic of China*, 1 May, p.77

<http://www.uscifr.gov/images/AR2009/final%20ar2009%20with%20cover.pdf> – Accessed 30 June 2010 – Attachment 17.

³⁰ US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2009, *Annual Report 2009*, 10 October, pp.119-120 - Attachment 18.

Attachments

1. Lim, L. 2010, 'China's Divided Catholics seek Reconciliation', National Public Radio, 20 July
2. US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, Macau)*, 26 October.
3. 'Another underground priest arrested in Fujian' 2010, *Asia News*, 24 March <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Another-underground-priest-arrested-in-Fujian-17965.html#> – Accessed 20 April 2010.
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14. Mitchell, T. 2010, 'China ordains bishops backed by Vatican', *Financial Times*, 9 May <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/5e4e4eba-5b7c-11df-85a3-00144feab49a.html> - Accessed 14 July 2010.
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17. United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2009, *USCIRF Annual Report 2009 – Countries of Particular Concern: People's Republic of China*, 1 May

<http://www.uscirf.gov/images/AR2009/final%20ar2009%20with%20cover.pdf> – Accessed 30 June 2010 –

18. US Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2009, *Annual Report 2009*, 10 October